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SUBJECT: VIETNAM SECURITY MINISTER PROMISES COORDINATION ON
TERRORISM, MONTAGNARDS; SUGGESTS A NOTIFICATION WORKING
GROUP

11. (SBU) Summary: Minister of Public Security Le Hong Anh told the Ambassador October 20 that he is pleased with the developing U.S.-Vietnam relationship and is "absolutely committed" to ensuring the safety and security not only of USG facilities and personnel, but also of Americans traveling to Vietnam. He noted that when in Vietnam both foreign visitors and Vietnamese employees of the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City are obligated to follow the laws and regulations of Vietnam and bear responsibility for violations. Minister Anh agreed that timely consular notification in cases of arrest or detention of American citizens is an important issue and proposed a "working session" between relevant sections of MPS and the Embassy. Referring to incidents involving harassment of FSN employees, Anh urged more discussion in cases in which "things happen that are unexpected or undesirable." On the subject of law enforcement and counterterrorism cooperation, Anh said MPS "highly appreciated" the information the United States had provided to Vietnam on terrorism and narcotics. He reaffirmed the right of Montagnard residents of the Central Highlands to join their relatives in the United States under legal immigration programs and asked for a list of cases in which we believed there had been problems obtaining documents. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The Ambassador called on Minister of Public Security Le Hong Anh October 20, accompanied by Poloff, RSO and the acting DEA Country Attache. Anh brought only his administrative chief of staff and the Director of the Department of International Cooperation; no one from the security side or the General Department of Police was present at the meeting.

CONSULAR NOTIFICATION

13. (SBU) The Ambassador stressed the seriousness with which he takes his responsibility for the welfare of American citizens in Vietnam and emphasized that the Embassy and Consulate General must have timely information about arrests and detentions of American citizens as well as the ability to hold frank and private conversations with American detainees. While taking care to emphasize the importance of foreign visitors' adhering to Vietnamese law, Anh acknowledged Vietnam's obligation to provide security for American citizens in Vietnam and to notify the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the event of the arrest or detention of an American citizen. The issue of notification, he said, "ought to be dealt with in a working session between relevant sections of the Ministry and the Embassy." (Note: Post will follow up on this offer next week. End Note.)

HARASSMENT OF FSNs

14. (SBU) The Ambassador noted to Minister Anh that some employees of the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City had been detained and interrogated by security personnel despite the fact that they were carrying out their regular and official duties. In the future, the Ambassador suggested, if MPS has concerns about the activity of a USG employee, MPS should raise it directly with the Embassy or Consulate General. For MPS to pursue these concerns directly with the employees is "very disturbing," the Ambassador said. Anh responded that, while personally unfamiliar with the cases the Ambassador referred to, he could think of no reason why USG locally hired employees are not free to act "if they are not violating regulations or rules." If there is some reason for an employee to do something "suspicious," the Embassy or Consulate General should inform MPS about which employee would be carrying out which task. "As the hosts of your diplomatic mission," Anh continued, "the government must create good conditions for the execution of bilateral relations. If some things happen that are unexpected or undesirable, we should discuss it."

MONTAGNARD FOLLOW-TO-JOIN APPLICANTS: NO PROBLEMS EXIST, BUT WE'LL INVESTIGATE

15. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the issue of over 250 Montagnard Visas 93 follow-to-join applicants from the Central Highlands whom we believed had encountered problems applying for passports and other necessary documents to complete their applications for permission to come to the United States. Minister Anh provided a lengthy explanation of Vietnam's ethnic harmony and (referring to the April 2004 protests in the Central Highlands) noted that "some people in some countries ignorant of the true situation in the Central Highlands" had distorted the situation created after the "recent excitement induced by undesirable people trying to undermine Vietnam." The Minister said that, for "eligible" applicants from the Central Highlands, there should be no difficulty in procuring documents and noted that Vietnam has extensive experience in cooperating with the United States on immigration, such as in the Humanitarian Resettlement Program. To facilitate a GVN inquiry, he asked the Ambassador to provide the names of people who had had difficulty in applying for documents. (Note: Post will work with ConGen Ho Chi Minh City to compile a list. End Note.)

COUNTERTERRORISM: APPRECIATE ASSISTANCE

16. (SBU) The Minister stated that, "on the issue of counterterrorism, MPS is committed to the fight." He noted that MPS greatly appreciates the information the USG provides on terrorism (and on narcotics cases) and said he hopes in the future to have "cooperation, support and assistance from the USG in dealing with terrorism." Minister Anh added that the sandbag-filled shipping containers the U.S. Embassy uses to provide setback space from the Chancery "have psychological effects only and are not effective in preventing terrorist attacks." The Ambassador replied that the value of additional setback in limiting damage from vehicle bomb attacks is well established. In response, Minister Anh said that MPS is committed to providing "absolute security for American facilities and personnel." He offered to consult with the City of Hanoi regarding the possibility of switching to more attractive and unobtrusive barriers to replace the Embassy's containers, but warned that, if the City's objections are due to "planning obstacles" or if the barriers are considered inconsistent with Hanoi's role as the cultural, economic and political capital of Vietnam, then there would be nothing MPS could do.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador stressed that in addition to the United States providing training and assistance to MPS on counterterrorism and counternarcotics, the two sides should be working closely at the operational level. The ability of law enforcement officers to work directly with each other - currently prohibited by MPS - is essential to the successful effort to combat terrorism and transnational crime. "Current bilateral counternarcotics and counterterrorism activities are commendable," the Ambassador said, "but we can and should do better" to achieve more effective cooperation. Minister Anh pointedly chose not to respond to this point.

18. (SBU) Comment: Minister Anh spoke softly in a southern accent and looked considerably older than his 55 years. There is a tendency to minimize Anh's power and influence and exaggerate the clout of two of his more outgoing deputies, Nguyen Van Huong (on the security side) and Le The Tiem (on the police side). This tendency is exacerbated by the fact that Minister Anh meets foreigners rarely - this meeting was his first with any American interlocutor in more than two years. We may, however, be underestimating him: Anh has made it to the top of a tough organization and has been an influential member of the Communist Party Central Committee for eight years.

19. (SBU) Comment, continued: Anh's cautious and diplomatic comments were within expectations, and in some areas (notably greater operational-level law enforcement cooperation, which he did not address at all) we will have to satisfy ourselves with the fact that our concerns have now been heard at the top. In other areas, such as the offer to review the list of Central Highlands Montagnards who have had trouble with local security forces and the suggestion of a working-level session on consular notification procedures, Anh's solution-oriented response was gratifying. The challenge, as always with MPS, will be translating policy-level promises into working-level action. End Comment.

MARINE